



Workforce education

An insider's perspective over the past 25 years

*By Jackie Carroll
MD of Optimi Workplace*



The last 18 months of the pandemic have significantly disrupted all facets of our country's education landscape, with the use of technology becoming crucial during this period.

But one thing that has remained constant since the dawn of democracy has been the steady and continued advances in the adult education and workplace training space. As Optimi Workplace, our offering – Media Works – is celebrating its 25th year as the leader in workforce education and training in South Africa.

This last quarter of a century has encouraged me to reflect on all the ways in which this space has evolved, and here is what I have learned.

The early years: 1996 to 2000

When Optimi Workplace's offering, Media Works, launched in 1996, the demographic we worked with was very specific. The learners completing our adult basic education and training (ABET) programmes were mostly black men in their 40s who had previously had very little or no access to education. Very few women attended our courses because they still were not part of the formal employment sector.

I have always felt that the profile of our learners is indicative of the ways in which the right to education was being exercised. In those early years, the aftershocks of Apartheid were still acutely felt.

Nevertheless, this was a pioneering time for our business. We were the first and only company providing computer-assisted training to adults. Armed with towers, monitors and floppy disks, we went to remote areas to train workers in the mining and agricultural sectors using what, at the time, was the latest technology. We knew that it was the only way we were going to make an impact while keeping quality consistent.

"We were the first and only company providing computer-assisted training for adults."

The arrival of SETAs: 2000 to 2010

At the start of the new millennium, the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) system started to gain momentum. SETA prioritised adult education across various sectors and fundamentally changed the way we worked. We were invited to train up to 15 000 people at a time through our multimedia programmes, and developed a strong relationship with the AgriSETA in particular.

It was during this time that we started to translate our content. We made our ABET level 1 material available in all 11 official languages and also, through funding we received from the local government, in Braille and sign language. If anything defined this era, it was the government – in collaboration with the private sector – living up to providing education *for all*.

Towards the end of this decade, we also released Accelerate, our flagship product that was intended to fast track the ABET process for learners who had found it slow and poorly managed in the past.

As we became more entrenched in providing workplace education and training, we became deeply familiar with the needs of our learners and their employers. Without realising it, we were paving the way for the formalised workplace content we produce under Optimi Workplace today.

"If anything defined this era, it was the government – in collaboration with the private sector – living up to providing education for all."

Changing demographics: 2010 to 2020

The years 2010 to 2020 were all about developing and improving online learning and, ironically, our ability to make our online content available offline, too. While technology improved dramatically, we found that South Africans were hamstrung by the high cost of data, hence the demand for data-friendly and offline content.

By now, we were also noticing a massive shift in our learner demographics. Not only were our learners younger and more evenly balanced in terms of gender, but they also had a stronger academic starting point. This meant that the basic education they were receiving at school was vastly superior to what it had been for learners during the Apartheid years. The right to education, formally expressed in the Bill of Rights in 1997, was bearing fruit.

“While technology improved dramatically, we found that South Africans were hamstrung by the high cost of data, hence the demand for data-friendly and offline content.”

The future of workplace education: Today and beyond

In 2018, Media Works was acquired by the Optimi Group, which is a subsidiary of the PSG Group. As a result, our decades of experience in adult and workplace education and our passion for innovation were distilled into a new division and entity called Optimi Workplace.

Since then, Media Works and community education facilitator Tuta-Me, have been fully integrated into the Optimi Group. This integration has enabled us at Optimi Workplace to make a real difference in learners' lives through face-to-face, online, and mobile education and training programmes.

We cannot ignore the impact COVID-19 had on our education system, and even though COVID-19 did not rescind the right to education, it certainly complicated how it could be realised.

Accessibility and quality remain the abiding education issues in South Africa, and while there are certainly still gaps to fill, Optimi Workplace is working hard to bridge them. Here's to the next 25 years.

Qualifications

The tools to empower your employees with a recognised qualification.

- **Academic programmes:** help your employees complete their basic education.
- **Skills programmes:** equip your team with credit-bearing skills, helping them to be effective employees.
- **Learnerships:** register your employees for one of our accredited work-based learnerships.

Short courses

Improve your workplace skills.

- **Workplace essentials:** Prepare employees for the world of work.
- **Occupational courses:** give employees the knowledge and skills they need to do their job.
- **Management training:** Help your team leaders become effective managers.
- **Personal development:** provide employees with general self-improvement knowledge and skills.

Institutional support

Take your institution's training and compliance to the next level.

- **Employee assessments:** evaluate performance and productivity.
- **B-BBEE advisory:** get the maximum value out of your training spend.
- **Training project management:** let us implement and manage your end-to-end training project.

Contact us



optimi
workplace



0861 696 757



enquiries@mediaworks.co.za



www.mediaworks.co.za

media works

tuta-me

